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THE
Previous Question

With Regard to

RELIGION.



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Miscellaneous Reflections, occasion'd by the Comet which appear'd in *December 1680*. Chiefly tending to explode Popular Superstitions. Written to a Doctor of the *Sorbon*, by Mr. *Bayle*. Translated from the *French*. To which is added, the Author's Life. 2 Vol.

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Humbly offer'd, as necessary
to be consider'd, in order to the
settling and determining all other
Questions on this Subject.

By THO. CHUBB.

THE FOURTH EDITION.

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With Reply to

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Humbly offered, as necessary
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Questions of Religion



By THO. CHURCH

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T H E
Previous Question

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RELIGION.



AS there is not any thing within the Compass of human Knowledge, which Man is more concern'd to discover, than what is *true Religion*; so there is not any Subject, Men have exercised their Thoughts upon, which

which has been more controverted, or that has produced more direful Effects amongst Mankind.

THE Disputes betwixt Christians, Mahometans, Jews, and Pagans, and betwixt the several Sects that take place amongst each of these, are generally about Religion : each Party thinking themselves obliged to defend and propagate what they esteem to be really such, and to root out, and abolish what they judge to be otherwise. And,

AS the Questions on this Subject are various, so there is one Question, namely, *What true Religion arises from, and is founded upon*, that is previous to them all ; the right understanding and settling of which Point, is necessary to the clearing and settling of the rest : With regard to which, I observe ;

TRUE Religion, I think, must arise from, and be founded upon, either the *moral Fitness of things*, or the *arbitrary Will and Pleasure of God* : And this, I think,

think, will plainly appear, when I have stated the Notion, and shewn in what Sense I understand the several Terms I here make use of.

BY the Term *Religion*, I understand that which is the *Ground of Divine Acceptance*: Or, in other Words, it is that which does render Men acceptable and pleasing to God. And,

BY *true Religion*, I mean that which does *really* do so; in opposition to every thing, which Men imagine or pretend will do it, when, in reality, it does not.

BY the *moral Fitness* of Things, I mean that Fitness, which arises from, and is founded in the *Nature* and the *Relations of Things*; taking it for granted, that there is an essential Difference betwixt Good and Evil, or Fitness and Unfitness, arising from the Nature and the Relations of Things, antecedent to, and independent of any divine or human Determination concerning them: So that,

WHEN

WHEN I say true Religion arises from, and is founded upon the moral Fitness of Things ; my meaning is (supposing that to be the Case) that the Duty which God requires at our hands, is such, as, in the nature of Things, is fit and proper to be required of, and expected from Creatures constituted, circumstanced, and related as we are ; and that the Ground of his being pleased with, and shewing us Favour, is, because we are the suitable, and proper Objects of his Approbation and Affection.

THE Term, *Arbitrary*, is opposed to *Restraint* ; and when it is apply'd to *human* Actions, the Restraint is of two kinds, namely, *Political*, and *Moral*.

POLITICAL Restraint is that which arises from the Law and Constitution of every Country, in which Men live, or which they rule over. And Men are said to act or not to act Arbitrarily, as their Actions are not, or as they are, govern'd and restrain'd by those Laws. As thus :

ALL

ALL those Princes, who act according to their own Will and Pleasure, and who have the sole Power of making Laws for, and the disposing of the Persons and Properties of their Subjects ; such Princes are said to be Arbitrary : And their Government is called Arbitrary Government, because they are not under the Direction nor the Restraint of Law, in the Exercise of it.

ON the other side, when Men act, or rule, not according to their own Will and Pleasure, but by, or according to a precedent Law ; then they are said not to act or rule Arbitrarily. As, when the King of *Great Britain* acts agreeably to the Laws of this Kingdom, then he is said not to act arbitrarily, that is, not to act against, or above Law ; because, in all such Cases, his Actions are govern'd and restrain'd by the Laws of his Country.

IT is not the good or bad Principle the Action springs from, nor yet the good or evil it produces, which denominates the

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Action

Action to be Arbitrary in this respect, or to be the contrary ; but only as the Actor is under, or above the Restraint of human Laws, as aforesaid.

MORAL Restraint is that which arises from the moral Fitness of Things : And Men are said to act arbitrarily in this respect, when they are under no such Restraint ; that is, when they act without any regard to the Fitness, or Unfitness of things, as aforesaid. And, on the other side, they are said not to act arbitrarily, in this respect, when they make the moral fitness of things, the Rule and Measure of their Actions.

TO apply the Term *Arbitrary* to God, it can respect only *moral* Restraint. For the human Laws are Rules for Men to direct their Behaviour by, and therefore Mens Actions may properly be said to be arbitrary, or to be otherwise, as the Actor is under, or above the Restraint of such Laws ; yet these are not a Rule to God. And therefore if his Actions are directed by any Law, it must be by the Fitness of Things, and consequently he cannot properly

perly be said to act arbitrarily, or the contrary, any otherwise, than as he is not, or as he is influenced, and restrained by the moral Fitness of Things, as aforesaid. So that when I apply the Term *Arbitrary* to God, I oppose it to moral Restraint, as above explained: which leads me to observe;

BY the Arbitrary Will of God, I mean (supposing this to be the Case) that he is not influenced and governed in his Dealings with his Creatures, by the moral Fitness of Things, but by sovereign Pleasure: he commands and forbids, loves and hates, rewards and punishes Arbitrarily; that is, without regarding the fitness, or unfitness of what he requires, or dispenses; or the suitableness, or unsuitableness of the Objects of his Approbation, or Dislike. And,

WHEN I say true Religion is founded upon the arbitrary Will of God, my meaning is, (supposing that to be the Case) that the Duty which God requires from us, and which when complied with, will render us the Objects of his Favour, does not arise

from its being right and fit, in the nature of Things, but merely from sovereign Pleasure : God makes whatever he pleases the Conditions of his Favour, without any regard to Right or Wrong in the Case.

HAVING thus explain'd the Terms, I think it evidently appears that *true Religion*, or that which will render Men acceptable to God, must be either, *what God has arbitrarily made the Conditions of his Favour* : or else, *that which, in the nature of Things, renders Men the suitable and proper Objects of it* : Which of these is the Case is the present Question. And,

THAT this Question, in Order of Nature, goes before all other Questions on this Subject ; and that the settling of it is necessary to the Settlement of the rest, and consequently, that it is of the greatest importance to Mankind ; this, I think, will as evidently appear as the former, when I have fairly examin'd the Point, and shewn how the Case will stand, in the several Particulars following, whether we consider true Religion as founded on the moral fitness

fitness of Things, or on arbitrary Pleasure, as aforesaid. And,

FIRST, if true Religion arises from, and is founded upon the moral fitness of Things, then God in this respect answers the Character, which the whole Frame of Nature gives him; that is, he acts the part of a *wise and good Being*.

IT is the utmost Perfection of Wisdom and Goodness, for a Being, who has all Knowledge and all Power absolutely and independently in himself, and is at perfect liberty in the Use and Exercise of these; for such an one, when he has call'd *moral Agents* into Being, not to take advantage of the *Impotency* and *Dependency* of such Creatures, by *imposing* upon them, or acting *arbitrarily* with them, or by them; but, on the contrary, to make the *moral Fitness* of Things the *Rule* and *Measure* of his *Actions*, with regard to what he requires from, and dispenses to them: this, I say, is Wisdom and Goodness to perfection. And this is the very Case with respect to God, supposing true Religion arises from,
and

and is founded upon the moral fitness of Things, as aforesaid.

GOD can, with regard to his natural Liberty and Ability, command from us, and deal with us, as he pleases ; he being above all possibility of Controul : And therefore, for him not to make use of his Knowledge and Power disagreeably, or to the disadvantage of his Creatures, but to direct these by the Rules of Wisdom and Goodness, in all his Dealings with them ; this is truly valuable, and highly worthy of that God, who is, by his own Choice, the *common Parent* of every Creature, as he *voluntarily* call'd them into Being. On the other side,

IF true Religion is founded on the arbitrary Will of God, then God does not, in this respect, answer the Character which Nature has given him ; that is, he *does not* act the part of a *wise and good Being*.

ONE who has all Knowledge and Power absolutely and independently in himself, and consequently must most clearly discern the

the essential Differences in Things ; and who is at perfect liberty to act from what Motive he pleases ; for such a *Being* to neglect, or refuse to act agreeably to the Nature, and the Relations of Things, and to make mere *capricious Humour* (if I may so speak) the *Rule* and *Measure* of his *Actions* ; for such an one to command for commanding sake, and not because what he requires is fit, and proper to be commanded ; for such an one to love and value, hate and despise, either Persons or Things, without regarding the suitableness or unsuitableness of the Persons, or the Things themselves ; these are Demonstrations of the want of *Wisdom* and *Goodness* in such a Being : and yet this is the Case with respect to God, supposing true Religion to be founded upon his arbitrary Will and Pleasure, as aforesaid.

GOD can, with regard to his natural Liberty and Power, act arbitrarily with his Creatures in matters of Religion ; that is, with respect to their Duty and his Acceptance : And so he can act the part of a *weak* and *childish*, or of an *evil* and *vicious*

cious Being. But he cannot act thus, and preserve his *moral* Character ; he cannot perform such a Part, and yet be a wise and good Being : because the doing so, is absolutely inconsistent with that Character. Again,

SECONDLY, if true Religion is founded on the moral fitness of Things ; then Man, by *his own natural Ability* (consider'd as a Man) is qualified to *discover it.*

MAN is a Creature endow'd with a Faculty or Power we call *Understanding* ; in the exercise of which, he is capable of discerning the essential Difference betwixt Good and Evil, or Fitness and Unfitness, as they arise from, and are founded in the Nature and the Relations of Things : which Good and Evil is call'd *Moral*, as it is the *Object* of the *Understanding*, and is discover'd by it only ; and as it is distinguished from that Good and Evil which is *Natural* or *Physical*, which is the *Object* of our *Senses*, and is discover'd by them alone.

MAN

MAN being thus furnish'd with the Faculty of Understanding, and true Religion being founded on the moral Fitness of Things, he must of course be qualified to discover it, because it falls within the proper Province of the foremention'd Faculty.

LET him but turn his Thoughts upon himself, and consider how he is constituted and circumstanced, and how he stands naturally related to God, and to his fellow Creatures; and then he may with ease discover and certainly know, what he must be and do, to render himself acceptable to such a wise and good Being, as (upon the present Supposition) God is allow'd to be; and what it is, in the Nature of Things, which will make him a suitable and proper Object of Divine Approbation, or Dislike. I say, a Man, by the exercise of his Understanding, may easily know what is true Religion; because it consists in acting *agreeably* to his *Nature, Relations, and Circumstances*, as aforesaid; which Agreeableness, his Understanding qualifies him to discover.

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IT is true, there may be Cases attended with such *perplexing* Circumstances, and whose Consequences may be so very *uncertain*, that it may be exceeding difficult to know what is best and fittest to be done. But then, even in these Cases, if a Man, after due Examination, does that which upon the *whole*, appears to him to be *best*, that is, what is most for the *common* Good; he will not fail of divine Acceptance, whatever the Consequence of his Behaviour may be. For, as he makes Wisdom and Goodness the Rule and Measure of his Actions, so, if God is a wise and good Being (as is here supposed) he will *approve* of such a Conduct. On the other side,

IF true Religion is founded on the arbitrary Will of God, then Man is *not*, by *his own natural Ability*, qualify'd to *discover* it: He has not any Footsteps to trace, nor any Rule to guide him, in his Inquiries after it. He is in this Case in a much worse Condition, than the blind Man is in, when in pursuit of the Objects of Sight: For tho the blind Man cannot discover the Object
fought

sought for, by that Sense, yet, possibly, he may do it by another ; whereas in the present Case, Man has not any natural Faculty, which can *discover* what is true Religion, or *distinguish* it from the contrary.

THE exercise of his Understanding cannot stand him in any stead. For tho it qualifies him to discern, and judge of moral Subjects ; yet as Religion, in this Case, is not of moral Consideration (it arising only from arbitrary Pleasure) so it does not come within the reach of this discerning Faculty. And therefore those Men say *right*, who say that *Reason* has not any thing to do with *Religion* ; supposing true Religion to be founded on arbitrary Pleasure, and that by Reason is meant either the Exercise of the fore-mentioned Faculty, or the Object of it, *viz.* the moral Fitness of Things.

TO *reason* in this Case, is exceedingly absurd, and is the same, as if a Man should attempt to distinguish *Colours* by his *Ear*. *Reason*, in the Nature of the thing, cannot discover, or be at all a Judge of those things

which depend only on the arbitrary Will of God: such things as these, are discoverable only by divine Revelation; so it is that alone which must determine every thing concerning them. Which leads me to observe,

THIRDLY, If true Religion is founded on the moral Fitness of Things, then Man is naturally qualify'd to *distinguish* betwixt *Divine Revelation* and *Delusion*; at least he is qualify'd to guard against all such Delusion, as is *hurtful* to Mankind.

WHEN any thing comes forth under the Character of Divine Revelation, our Understandings qualify us to examine and judge, whether it is agreeable with, or contrary to the Nature and the Relations of Things. And tho its Agreeableness with the Nature of Things, is no certain Proof that it is Divine, but only that it *may* be so; yet its Disagreeableness therewith is a Demonstration, that it *cannot* possibly come from God; seeing (upon the present Supposition) God makes the moral Fitness of Things the rule

rule and measure of his Actions ; which such a Revelation is repugnant to.

FOR the farther Illustration of this Point, I shall offer the following Cases.

SUPPOSE a Man should come to me under the Character of a heavenly Messenger, and should declare it to be the Will of God, that I should love my Neighbour as my self, and do unto all Men, as I would they should do unto me, (taking these general Rules with their proper Limitations) and that in doing so I should recommend my self to divine Regard : And, suppose this Man was not sent of God, but was himself under a Delusion ; I examine his Message, and find that it is right and fit, in the Nature of Things, that I should do as it requires ; and that in so doing I render my self a suitable Subject of divine Favour : I likewise (from the suitableness of the Message) am induced to give credit to what the Man declares of himself, *viz.* that he is a Messenger sent from God. Now, tho in this latter Point I am deceived, yet it is not to my hurt ; and if I am prevailed upon

upon by it, to render myself more agreeable and useful than I should otherwise have been, the Delusion will prove a Benefit to me, and to those I have to do withal. Again,

SUPPOSE a Man should come to me, and pretend himself a heavenly Messenger, as aforesaid; and should declare it to be the Will of God, that I should afflict and grieve my fellow Creatures, without any just Cause, that is, for not agreeing with me in some speculative Points, which do not admit of absolute Certainty on either side of the Question; and in like Cases, where in the Nature of the thing, there is not a proper Foundation for Resentment; and that in so doing I should entitle myself to divine Favour: I examine this Message, and find it really disagreeable in the Nature of Things; and from hence conclude very justly, that this Message is not Divine, and consequently that the Messenger is either deluded himself, or else that he is an Impostor.

SO that I have a plain Rule to direct and guide my Judgment, in distinguishing betwixt Divine Revelation, and all dangerous and hurtful Delusions : And therefore, as I said before, tho in this Case we are not absolutely secure from all Imposition, yet we are qualify'd to guard against all such as is prejudicial to Mankind, as I have here shewn. Whereas, on the other side,

IF true Religion is founded on arbitrary Pleasure, then Man is not qualify'd to distinguish betwixt Divine Revelation and Delusion, and consequently lies open to, and at the Mercy of every Imposer.

THE *internal* Characters of a Revelation, whether good or bad, afford no Light in this Case. For, as God makes whatever he pleases the Conditions of his Favour, so the Goodness or Badness of a Revelation, or of what is required by it, cannot possibly prove it to be Divine, or to be the contrary.

IF

IF I should take upon me to prove a Revelation to be Divine, or to be otherwise, from its agreeableness with, or its being contrary to Truth, Justice, Goodness, &c. it would be just the same, as if I attempted to prove that a Man can see, by giving several Instances in which it is evident that he heard; there being no more Connexion betwixt Justice, Goodness, &c. and arbitrary Pleasure, so as to argue from one to the other, than there is betwixt Colour and Sound.

THE Case is the same with respect to any thing *external*, such as Miracles, which may attend a Revelation: The having these, or the want of them, cannot possibly prove a Revelation to be Divine, or to be the contrary.

THE *having* them proves nothing, in the present Case; because Miracles are Evidences of the *Power*, but not of the *Veracity* of the Being that works them; and consequently, they may attend a *Lye*, for any thing

thing we know, or for any just Ground we have to think the contrary.

TO urge in this Case, that God will not use his Power, nor suffer other Beings, viz. Evil Spirits to use theirs, for the Confirmation of a Lye, in a matter of such Importance; this is the same as to say, that God does not act Arbitrarily, but from the Fitness of Things; because this Argument is founded upon the *moral* Unfitness of such a Conduct. Again,

THE want of Miracles does not avail any thing, with regard to the Divinity of a Revelation, or the contrary. For as God does not make the Fitness of Things, but sovereign Pleasure, the Rule and Measure of his Actions; so when he gives a Revelation, it must be wholly at his pleasure, whether Miracles shall attend it or not: and consequently, we cannot fairly conclude from the want of Miracles, either for or against the Divinity of that Revelation, they do not attend. Again,

FOURTHLY, If true Religion is founded on the moral Fitness of Things, then Man is naturally qualify'd to discover the *true Sense* and *Meaning* of Divine Revelation; at least he is or may be secure from all *dangerous* and *hurtful Errors*.

DIVINE Revelation in this Case, must accord with the Nature and Relations of Things, and therefore, if any Difficulty should arise about the Sense and Meaning of any Branch of it, Man has a safe and plain Rule, *viz.* the Fitness of Things, to interpret it by; which in the Nature of the Thing, is most *likely* to lead him into the true Sense of it: however, it will secure him from all dangerous Errors; because he cannot possibly fall into a *hurtful Error*, when the moral Fitness of Things is his Guide.

If it should be urged, That the Fitness of Things is a proper Guide in this Case, with regard to those Parts of Divine Revelation that relate to Practice; yet it can give no
light

light with regard to those Points, which are purely speculative:

I, ANSWER, Points of Speculation are of two kinds, *viz.* those which are absolutely so, and those which are so only with regard to us. As to the former, they relate to the physical Nature of Things; and therefore, if God shall think fit to give any Revelations of this kind, then it must be granted, that the moral Fitness of Things can give no Light in such Cases. But then it ought to be remembered, that God will either so *clearly* deliver such Points, as that there shall be *no place* for Error, or else he will *excuse* all Errors which arise from them; it being most absurd and ridiculous, to suppose, that such a wise and good Being, as (upon the present Supposition) God is allowed to be, should give a Revelation in a way, in which it is liable to be misunderstood, and then be displeased with his Creatures, if they mistake the Sense of it; seeing such Errors are not, in the Nature of the Thing, a proper Foundation for Resentment.

AS to the latter, *viz.* Points of Speculation, which are so only with regard to us, these relate to Facts past, present, or to come, performed by God, or some other Agent; with respect to which, the same Answer in general will serve, as in the former Case; namely, That if God shall think fit to reveal any thing of this kind, he will either make the Revelation so *plain*, as that there shall be no Place for Error, or else *excuse* all Errors which spring from it. And,

IF the Point be such as relates to divine Conduct, either what God has done, or will do; and if any difficulty arise about the Sense and Meaning of any such Branch of divine Revelation; then, I say, the *Fitness of Things* is the *best Rule* to interpret it by, and is most likely to lead us into the true Sense and Meaning of it. And the Reason of this is evident, namely, because (upon the present Supposition) it is the moral Fitness of Things, which is the Rule and Measure of God's Actions. On the other side,

IF

IF true Religion is founded on the arbitrary Will of God, and if God gives a Revelation to Mankind, then Man is not naturally qualified to discover the true Sense and Meaning of it, he not having any thing to guide him in his Enquiries; and therefore must be under the utmost uncertainty in that Case. For,

AS God acts from sovereign Pleasure, so he may deliver his Mind either clearly or darkly, expressly or in Figures; he may use the same Term in the same or in different Senses, and apply it properly or improperly to the Subject, as he pleases; and Man has not any thing to assist or guide him in his Searches after Truth.

TO *reason* in this Case, is likewise *absurd*; because that which arises from arbitrary Pleasure, is out of Reason's Province: and therefore those Men say right, who say that Reason is not a Judge of the Sense and Meaning of Divine Revelation; and that it must be interpreted by the same Spirit, which gave it. I say, this is evidently

dently the Case, supposing God acts arbitrarily with his Creatures; only this Difficulty will still remain, namely, That we have as little assurance of the Sense and Meaning of any second explanatory Revelation, as of the first.

TO say in this Case, that God will not suffer a sincere and honest Enquirer, who seeks his Face, to fall into, or continue in any dangerous Error; this, if it be urg'd with any strength, is to reason from the moral Fitness of Things, which is here supposed to be discarded. And,

AS Man is not secure from Error, so his Errors may be made as fatal to him as his Maker pleases: God may, if he please, punish every Mistake with eternal Misery; and if he should do so, (the contrary to which we cannot be assured of, upon the present Supposition) there is no Relief, for who can deliver out of his Hand? Again,

FIFTHLY and lastly, If true Religion is founded on the moral Fitness of Things,

Things, then it is one plain, simple, uniform Thing, which admits of no Alteration, with regard to Time or Place, any otherwise than as the Nature, the Relations, and the Circumstances of Things differ or change.

TRUE Religion is the same in all Ages, in all Countries, and in all Worlds, (if I may so speak ;) for if any of the other Planets are inhabited with Creatures constituted, circumstanced, and related as we are, their Religion must of course be the same as ours is; the moral Fitness of Things being the same in all Space, and thro' all Duration.

NOTE, I would not here be understood to exclude all positive Institutions: for, as the Circumstances of Things may render some Institutions proper and useful to Mankind, as contributing to *Virtue*, or *true Goodness*; so when that is the Case, there is a moral Fitness even in those Institutions, not for any intrinsic Goodness in them, but upon the account of that *Virtue* they

they are subservient to. On the other side,

IF true Religion is founded on the arbitrary Will of God, then it depends upon his Pleasure, whether it shall be the same at all Times, and to all People, or not; he may, if he pleases, make different Terms of Acceptance, in every Age, and to every Nation or Family; and that which entitles to his Favour to day, may draw forth his Displeasure to morrow, for any thing we know, or for any Ground we have to think the contrary.

TO say in this Case, that God will always make known his Pleasure to us, when he makes any such Change with regard to Religion, this is what we can have no just Ground for. That it is right and fit, in the Nature of Things, for God to act thus fairly with his Creatures, will be granted; but what has Right and Fit to do, or what Influence can they have, where arbitrary Pleasure is the Rule of Action? Which is the present Case.

THUS

THUS, I think, I have given a fair Representation of this Matter, and have shewn in all the Instances I have given above, how the Case will stand, whether we consider true Religion as founded on the *moral Fitness of Things*, or on the *arbitrary Will of God*. And I imagine, it will easily be discerned, of what great Importance this Question is, and what Necessity there is of determining it, in order to the settling and determining all other Questions on this Subject. But,

POSSIBLY it may be urged, that I have started a Difficulty, but not removed it ; and therefore I crave leave to observe farther, that there are two Ways only, in which we are capable of bringing this Point to an Issue ; namely, *First*, by examining what it is, which God makes the Rule of Action in other Cases, and so to argue by Analogy ; that is, to infer from his Conduct in one Case, how he will act in another : and, *Secondly*, to examine what it is, in the Nature of
 E Things,

Things, which is most likely to direct and determine his Actions. And,

FIRST, If we examine what it is, which God makes the Rule of Action in other Cases, we shall find that it is the moral Fitness of Things. Whoever takes a View of this Planet, and of all the other Works of God, which come within the reach of human Knowledge, will easily see the Marks of Wisdom and Goodness that run thro' the Whole; every Part being directed to answer some wise and good End.

TO go about to exemplify this by an Induction of Particulars, would be to offer an Affront to the common Sense and Reason of Mankind; it being that which falls within every Man's Observation, tho' it is more abundantly evident to all those who are qualify'd to examine and look into the Works of Nature: And therefore, if an Argument drawn from *Analogy*, is at any time of weight, it must be so in the present Case; and consequently, true Religion is not founded on arbitrary Pleasure,

are, but on the moral Fitness of Things.
Again,

SECONDLY, If we examine what it is, in the Nature of Things, which is most likely to direct and determine God's Actions, we shall find it to be the moral Fitness of Things; as aforesaid.

THAT God is, and what he is with regard to his natural Properties, these I shall not meddle with the Proof of, but shall take it for granted, that God is, and that he is necessarily an Immense, Eternal, All-knowing, All-powerful, and consequently a Self-sufficient, Independent, and Unchangeable Being.

THIS being allowed, from hence it will follow, that as God is always capable of doing what is most worthy and valuable in itself, and which in the Nature of Things is right, good, best, and fittest to be done; seeing he knows wherein the Goodness, Fitness, and Valuableness of every Action lies; so it is most likely, that he always will act thus, because right,

good, &c. are so very beautiful and excellent in themselves, and so highly preferable in the Nature of Things, to arbitrary Pleasure, that God cannot but be under a stronger Disposition to make these, rather than the other, the Rule and Measure of his Actions.

SO that whether we consider the Method of God's Dealing in other Cases, or whether we consult the Nature of Things ; these both conclude very strongly, that true Religion arises from, and is founded upon the moral Fitness of Things, and not the arbitrary Will of God.

IF it should be urged, Allowing that God does *generally* make the Fitness of Things the Rule of his Actions, yet it will not follow that he *always* does so; he is the Great and Only Potentate, whose Dominion is underived, and therefore he may *sometimes* act Arbitrarily, to shew his Creatures the absolute Sovereignty he has over them.

I ANSWER, God may or can do thus with regard to any Physical Necessity he is under to the contrary: But that he does act thus, will not be allowed; for if the moral Fitness of Things is a Motive proper and sufficient to influence the Divine Conduct in *one* Case, it must be so in *every* Case; the Reason being the same, and as proper to influence in *all* Cases, as in *some*. Besides,

THIS is measuring the Ways of God, by what we see take place among *weak* and *vain* Men; they are apt to shew the Power and Dominion they have over their fellow Creatures, by acting such a Part as the Objection supposes: but can we have so mean and contemptible a Thought of our Maker? Can we imagine that our wise and good God will prefer such an *affected* shew of *Greatness*, to what is *truly Great* and *Valuable*? Yea, rather let us call back the ungenerous Thought, with a *God forbid!*

NOTE, When I say it will not be allow'd that God acts Arbitrarily, my meaning is, that

that he will not act thus in all those Cases where the moral Fitness of Things can be a Rule to him : As to all other Cases, he must act Arbitrarily, if he acts at all ; because the Fitness of Things does not come into the Question. As thus :

SUPPOSE it equally indifferent with regard to this System, and all other Systems in the Universe, that the Solar System be placed where it now is, or in any other Part of Space ; then Fitness, or Unfitness, does not come into the Case : and therefore the placing the Solar System in this Part of Space, and not in any other, must be Arbitrary ; because there was not any thing in the Nature of Things which could give the Preference, and make it more fit, that it should be placed where it is, rather than in any other Part of Space.

MR 58

THE END.

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